THE SEA BETWEEN TWO EVENINGS

A Sri Lankan Love Novella

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To my family, thank you for the love, patience, encouragement, and quiet support that help every dream take its first step.

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To every reader who opens these pages, thank you for giving this story your time and imagination. I hope that somewhere between Colombo's crowded buses, Galle's sea breeze, temple bells at dusk, cups of plain tea, and the sound of rain on tiled roofs, you find a memory of your own.

And to Sri Lanka — its streets, trains, buses, temples, homes, food, rain, sea, and everyday people — thank you for being the quiet world behind this story.

Some stories are invented.

Some are remembered.

And some live somewhere in between.

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The Sinhala words and expressions used throughout the story are included as part of the cultural setting and natural voice of the work.

THE SEA BETWEEN TWO EVENINGS

A Sri Lankan Love Novella

CHAPTER ONE

The Seat by the Window

The first thing Nethmi noticed about him was that he was wet.

Not completely wet.

Just his hair.

There were tiny drops of rain still sitting on it when he climbed into the bus, and one of them rolled slowly down the side of his forehead before disappearing near his eyebrow.

She noticed this because she had nothing better to do.

It was Monday morning, and the Colombo traffic had already decided that nobody deserved happiness.

The bus had stopped at least four times within the last ten minutes.

Every time it moved, it stopped again.

“Yanna, yanna! Issarahata yanna!”

The conductor was shouting at people to move inside.

Nobody moved.

There was nowhere to move.

Nethmi stood near the front door, one hand gripping the metal bar and the other holding her bag tightly against her chest.

Someone's umbrella was touching her shoulder.

A schoolboy behind her smelled strongly of coconut oil.

A woman beside the driver was talking loudly into her phone.

“Amma, mama kiwwane mama enawa kiyala. Traffic eka ne.”

Nethmi looked outside.

Traffic.

Of course.

Colombo was already awake.

Shops were pulling up their shutters.

Three-wheelers slipped through impossible gaps.

A man stood beside a tea stall pouring plain tea from one metal cup into another, raising his hand higher and higher until the tea stretched into a thin brown stream.

The smell reached the bus.

Tea.

Fried vadai.

Fish buns.

Petrol.

Wet pavement.

Colombo mornings had their own smell.

You couldn't call it beautiful.

But after living with it long enough, you missed it when it was gone.

Nethmi checked the time.

7:38.

“Jesus,” she whispered.

She was going to be late.

Again.

The bus jerked forward.

She almost fell.

Someone caught the back of her bag.

“Careful.”

She turned.

The wet-haired boy.

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

He let go.

She turned back.

Two seconds later, the bus stopped again.

A man climbed aboard.

Then another.

Then a woman with a sleeping child.

Then the wet-haired boy moved forward.

Nethmi watched him from the corner of her eye.

He was carrying a black backpack and a blue file.

Nothing special about him.

Not the kind of person you would notice on the street.

He looked like every other young man travelling into Colombo.

Except he was now looking around for somewhere to sit.

There was one empty seat.

Next to her.

Nethmi immediately moved her bag.

She wasn't sure why.

He noticed.

He looked at the seat.

Then at her.

“Can I?”

She nodded.

He sat.

Their shoulders touched.

Both moved away at the same time.

Nethmi almost laughed.

Almost.

The bus moved.

The boy looked through the window.

She looked through hers.

Five minutes passed.

Neither spoke.

Then the bus went over a pothole.

His shoulder hit hers.

“Sorry.”

“It's okay.”

Another pothole.

This time her shoulder hit his.

She moved away quickly.

“Sorry.”

He smiled.

“Now we're even.”

Nethmi turned to him.

He had an annoying face.

Not actually annoying.

Just the kind of face that looked like it was always about to make a joke.

She looked away.

“Very funny.”

“I wasn't trying to be funny.”

“You were.”

“Okay.”

Silence again.

She stared outside.

He looked down.

Then, after another minute—

“Are you going to Fort?”

Nethmi turned.

“Yes.”

“Okay.”

She waited.

He said nothing.

“Why?”

He looked confused.

“What?”

“You asked me if I'm going to Fort.”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

He thought for a second.

“No reason.”

Nethmi stared at him.

He smiled.

She looked away.

This time she really did laugh.

Very quietly.

The bus moved through another junction.

A Buddhist temple appeared between two buildings.

Its white wall was wet from the morning rain.

Somewhere inside, a bell rang.

Nethmi looked at the time again.

7:46.

She was definitely late.

The boy noticed.

“You're going to be late.”

She turned sharply.

“How do you know?”

“You keep looking at the time.”

“Oh.”

He smiled.

“Don't worry. I'm also late.”

“That's supposed to make me feel better?”

“No.”

She smiled despite herself.

“What are you studying?” he asked.

“University.”

“Which one?”

She told him.

He nodded.

“I'm also studying.”

“I didn't ask.”

“Okay.”

She turned to the window.

He looked at her.

She could feel it.

“Why are you looking at me?”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

“Okay.”

He turned away.

Nethmi shook her head.

Idiot.

But she was smiling.

His name was Kavish.

She learned that when they got off the bus.

He stood near the door while everyone pushed toward the exit.

Nethmi waited.

“Go, go,” the conductor said.

She stepped down.

Then—

“Nethmi.”

She stopped.

She turned around.

Kavish was standing on the bus step.

“How do you know my name?”

He pointed at her chest.

Her student ID.

She looked down.

“Oh.”

He laughed.

“I didn't investigate you.”

“Good.”

The bus was beginning to move.

“Wait.”

“What?”

“Are you coming tomorrow?”

She stared at him.

“Why?”

He shrugged.

“So I know whether to sit here.”

She looked at the seat.

Then at him.

“Maybe.”

She stepped away.

The bus moved.

Kavish watched her through the window.

Nethmi watched him too.

Only for a few seconds.

Then the bus disappeared into traffic.

She stood there.

The city moved around her.

A man shouted into a phone.

A three-wheeler honked.

Someone dropped a plastic bottle.

A newspaper boy called out the headlines.

Nethmi looked at her watch.

7:59.

She had one minute to stop thinking about the boy.

She failed.

The next morning she arrived ten minutes early.

This was not because of Kavish.

Obviously.

It was because she didn't want to be late.

That was all.

She stood at the bus stop.

A bus came.

Not his.

Another.

Not his.

Then, at 7:31, the same bus appeared.

Her stomach did something strange.

“Aiyo,” she whispered.

She hated that.

The bus stopped.

People climbed down.

Then Kavish appeared.

He saw her.

His face changed.

A small smile.

Nethmi tried not to smile.

She failed.

He got down.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

“Progress.”

“What?”

“Yesterday you didn't say good morning.”

“We didn't know each other yesterday.”

“And today?”

She looked at him.

“Little bit.”

He nodded seriously.

“Okay. Progress.”

She laughed.

The conductor shouted.

“Madam! Get in!”

Nethmi quickly climbed aboard.

Kavish followed.

The same seat was empty.

He looked at it.

She moved her bag.

He sat.

For a while, they watched the road.

The city was waking around them.

A bakery had opened.

Warm bread smell entered through the bus window.

A woman carried a tray of buns across the pavement.

Two men were standing outside a tea shop arguing about cricket.

“I told you, he can't bat anymore.”

“Aney, don't talk nonsense. One good match and you'll change your whole story.”

Kavish looked at Nethmi.

“Cricket arguments before eight in the morning.”

“So?”

“Only in Sri Lanka.”

She smiled.

“You don't watch cricket?”

“I do.”

“Then?”

“I don't understand people who shout at the television.”

“They're not shouting at the television.”

“Then who?”

“The players.”

“They can't hear you.”

Nethmi looked at him.

“You don't understand Sri Lankan cricket.”

“Clearly.”

She laughed.

And that morning, without knowing it, they began.

They didn't become close quickly.

That was what made it real.

There were no sudden confessions.

No instant obsession.

They simply became familiar.

Kavish started saving the seat.

Nethmi started arriving early.

Sometimes he brought tea.

The first time, he handed her a paper cup.

She looked at it.

“What?”

“Tea.”

“I can see that.”

“I bought it for you.”

“Why?”

“Because yesterday you said you like plain tea.”

She took it.

“Thanks.”

He frowned.

“Don't say thanks like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like I'm proposing.”

Nethmi nearly dropped the tea.

“What?”

He started laughing.

“You should've seen your face.”

“You idiot!”

People looked at them.

She lowered her voice.

“Don't laugh!”

“Sorry.”

“You're not sorry.”

“No.”

She tried to look angry.

She couldn't.

The tea was too hot.

She blew on it.

Kavish watched her.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You're doing it again.”

“What?”

“Looking.”

“I'm just sitting.”

“Then sit properly.”

He turned toward the window.

Nethmi smiled into her tea.

She didn't know why she kept the empty cup.

She threw it away later.

But for a while she carried it around in her bag.

One evening, rain came without warning.

Colombo rain didn't ask permission.

One moment the road was bright and dusty.

The next, the sky became dark and water came down so hard that people ran into shops.

Nethmi stood under the roof of a tea stall.

Kavish stood beside her.

The tea stall was crowded.

The air smelled of wet clothes, ginger tea, fried vadai and rain.

A radio played an old Sinhala song.

Someone shouted for two plain teas.

Someone else shouted for rolls.

Outside, buses passed with water spraying from their wheels.

Nethmi looked at the road.

“I'm going to get wet.”

Kavish looked at her.

“Obviously.”

“Don't be annoying.”

“You said something obvious.”

She turned.

“Give me your umbrella.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because I'm going home too.”

“You can walk with me.”

The words came out before she could stop them.

Kavish became quiet.

Nethmi looked away.

“I mean…”

“I know.”

“Don't make it weird.”

“I'm not.”

He opened the umbrella.

It was small.

Too small.

They stepped into the rain.

Their shoulders touched.

Nethmi moved slightly away.

Kavish moved the umbrella toward her.

She noticed.

“You're getting wet.”

“I'm okay.”

“Your whole shoulder is wet.”

“I'm from Galle. We have rain too.”

She looked at him.

“Galle?”

“Born there.”

“Then why do you live here?”

“Studies.”

“Oh.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You sound disappointed.”

“Why would I be disappointed?”

“Maybe you thought I was Colombo-born.”

“Why would I care?”

“Okay.”

“Stop.”

“Okay.”

They walked.

Rain hit the umbrella.

Cars moved slowly.

A man selling corn covered his cart with a blue sheet.

A bus conductor leaned out and shouted a destination.

The city was loud even in the rain.

Kavish held the umbrella more toward her.

Nethmi looked at his shoulder.

Wet.

“You're getting soaked.”

“I'm okay.”

She smiled.

“Idiot.”

They kept walking.

At one point, a bus came too close to the pavement.

Kavish caught her wrist and pulled her away.

For one second they stood very close.

His hand was around her wrist.

The rain fell around them.

Neither moved.

Then he let go.

“Sorry.”

Nethmi looked at her wrist.

Then at him.

“It's okay.”

They walked again.

But something had changed.

Neither of them spoke about it.

That night, Nethmi lay in bed listening to rain hit the tiled roof of her house.

Her mother was in the kitchen.

“Duwa, phone eka off karala nidaganna!”

“Thawa poddak, amma!”

“Poddak kiyanne dawas dekak!”

Nethmi laughed.

Her mother shouted again.

“Monawada oya hina wenne?”

“Nothing!”

She turned off the light.

Her room became dark.

She thought about Kavish's hand around her wrist.

Then she pulled the blanket over her face.

“Aiyo.”

She didn't know whether she was embarrassed or happy.

Probably both.

Kavish went home to Galle that weekend.

His mother was waiting at the gate.

“You're late.”

“Bus.”

“Every time bus.”

“Amma, I'm hungry.”

“Wash your hands.”

The house smelled like rice, dhal, fried brinjal and coconut sambol.

Kavish washed his hands and sat down.

His father was watching television.

A cricket match was on.

“Thaththa.”

“Hmm.”

“Ayubowan.”

“Hmm.”

His mother put food on his plate.

“Eat.”

Kavish looked at the plate.

“Amma, this is too much.”

“Eat.”

“I can't.”

“Then don't complain that you're hungry.”

His father laughed.

Kavish looked at him.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

His mother smiled.

“Who is annoying you in Colombo?”

Kavish stopped eating.

“Who?”

“Someone.”

“Amma.”

She laughed.

“Why are you smiling at your phone every night?”

“I'm not.”

His father looked over.

Kavish immediately looked down.

“University friends.”

“Girl?”

“Thaththa!”

His father laughed.

His mother looked at him carefully.

“Good girl?”

Kavish didn't answer.

His mother understood.

“Ah.”

“Amma, please.”

“I didn't say anything.”

“You did.”

“Eat.”

He continued eating.

His father watched him for a moment.

Then said quietly,

“Just remember, son. Don't forget what you're doing with your life.”

Kavish looked up.

“I won't.”

“Good.”

That was all.

But the sentence stayed with him.

CHAPTER TWO

Galle, Colombo, and the Space Between

By January, Nethmi knew Kavish's habits.

He hated papaya.

He always lost his pen.

He checked his phone before leaving the house, then checked it again after reaching the bus stop.

He liked plain tea with very little sugar.

He claimed he wasn't afraid of dogs, but he crossed the road whenever a big one came near.

He laughed when he was nervous.

He became quiet when something really mattered.

That last one worried her.

Because lately, Kavish had been quiet.

They were sitting in a small café near Bambalapitiya.

A cricket match played on the television.

The café smelled of fish buns and frying onions.

Nethmi was drinking lime juice.

Kavish was eating a samosa.

“Why are you staring?”

“I wasn't.”

“You were.”

“I was looking at the television.”

“The television is behind me.”

She looked behind him.

Then back.

“Maybe I like looking behind you.”

“Very clever.”

“Thank you.”

He smiled.

She didn't.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing.”

She put down her glass.

“There.”

“What?”

“That.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

He sighed.

“Okay.”

She looked at him.

“Kavish.”

“Hmm?”

“Tell me.”

He put the samosa down.

“My father called.”

“So?”

“He wants me to go back to Galle after I finish.”

Nethmi's fingers tightened around the glass.

“Oh.”

“I don't know yet.”

“Why?”

“Because…”

He stopped.

She waited.

“Because Colombo isn't home.”

Nethmi looked away.

That sentence shouldn't have hurt.

But it did.

She watched a bus pass outside.

“What about me?”

She didn't mean to say it.

Kavish froze.

Nethmi's face became hot.

“I mean…”

“No.”

He leaned forward.

“What did you mean?”

She stared at her glass.

“Nothing.”

“Don't.”

She looked up.

“You told me not to say nothing.”

“I know.”

“Then don't say it.”

“Okay.”

He sat back.

She could hear the cricket commentator.

The café fan clicked overhead.

A waiter dropped a spoon.

Outside, somebody shouted,

“Thambili! Thambili!”

Nethmi suddenly wanted to go home.

But she stayed.

Because she had started to understand that love wasn't only the nice part.

It was also this.

The conversations you wanted to avoid.

The questions you were afraid to ask.

The answers you were afraid to hear.

That weekend, Kavish went to Galle.

His father was sitting outside when he arrived.

“Come.”

Kavish sat.

The evening was quiet.

A neighbour's child was playing cricket in the lane.

The ball hit a wall.

“Out!”

“No, not out!”

His mother shouted from inside.

“Stop shouting!”

The boys laughed.

Kavish smiled.

His father didn't.

“Your uncle called.”

Kavish's smile faded.

“About the job?”

“Yes.”

“What did you tell him?”

“I said you would think.”

Kavish looked at him.

“I want to stay in Colombo.”

His father stared at him.

“Why?”

Kavish said nothing.

His father looked toward the road.

“Is it because of a girl?”

Kavish's stomach dropped.

“Thaththa...”

“I'm not angry.”

“Then?”

“I asked.”

Kavish rubbed his palms together.

“Yes.”

His father nodded.

“What is her family like?”

Kavish blinked.

“What?”

“I'm asking you.”

“I don't know.”

“Then what do you know?”

Kavish smiled despite himself.

“She likes plain tea.”

His father stared at him.

Kavish laughed.

“Sorry.”

His father didn't laugh.

“You're making jokes.”

“Because I'm nervous.”

His father sighed.

“Love is easy when you are young.”

Kavish looked at him.

“Then what is difficult?”

“Keeping a life together.”

Silence.

His father continued.

“You think the difficult part is falling in love. It isn't.”

“Then?”

“It's deciding what you are willing to carry.”

Kavish looked down.

His father said,

“Don't hurt her. But don't promise her a life you haven't built.”

That night, Kavish couldn't sleep.

He went outside.

The neighbourhood was quiet.

The temple bell rang at dusk, then stopped.

The air smelled like salt.

Galle's sea breeze came through the trees.

He sat on the wall.

His phone lit up.

Nethmi: Reached home?

He smiled.

Yes.

How is Galle?

He looked around.

Same.

That's not an answer.

He smiled.

Sea. Wind. Cricket. My amma shouting because I don't eat enough.

Sounds nice.

He typed:

You'd like it.

He stared at it.

Then sent it.

Three dots appeared.

Disappeared.

Appeared again.

Maybe one day.

Kavish read it twice.

Then again.

Maybe one day.

He leaned back.

For the first time that evening, he felt hopeful.

The trip happened in March.

Nethmi told her mother she was going to Galle with friends.

Her mother looked at her.

“Which friends?”

She named them.

Her mother nodded.

“Come home before dark.”

“Okay.”

“Phone eka answer karanna.”

“Okay.”

“And don't get into the sea.”

“Amma!”

“I'm serious.”

Nethmi laughed.

“Okay.”

Her mother looked at her for a moment.

Then quietly said,

“Be careful with people's hearts too.”

Nethmi stopped.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Amma!”

Her mother smiled.

“Go.”

Nethmi left.

But her mother's sentence followed her all the way to the railway station.

The train was crowded.

They stood near the door.

The coastline appeared and disappeared between buildings.

Nethmi watched the sea.

Kavish watched her.

“Why?”

She turned.

“Why what?”

“Why are you looking at me?”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

He smiled.

“You always know.”

“Because you're obvious.”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

She turned back toward the sea.

After a while she said,

“Do you ever think about the future?”

Kavish leaned against the side of the train.

“Sometimes.”

“Only sometimes?”

“Mostly when I'm scared.”

She looked at him.

“Are you scared now?”

He looked at her.

“Yes.”

She didn't ask why.

She already knew.

Galle was hot.

The Fort walls were warm beneath their hands.

They ate ice cream.

They bought thambili.

They walked past old buildings with peeling paint.

They sat near the sea.

They watched children play cricket.

Nethmi took a photograph.

Kavish said,

“Don't post that.”

“Why?”

“I look bad.”

“You always look bad.”

He stared at her.

She laughed.

“Sorry.”

“No, no. It's okay.”

“You're offended.”

“I'm deeply hurt.”

She smiled.

Then rain came.

Hard.

They ran beneath a tiled roof.

The rain hammered above them.

Nethmi laughed.

Kavish looked at her.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You keep looking.”

“You look happy.”

She became quiet.

“I'm happy.”

He looked away.

“Good.”

“Why did you say it like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like you were sad.”

He didn't answer.

The rain continued.

Nethmi watched the water running from the roof.

“Kavish.”

“Hmm?”

“Say it.”

“What?”

“Whatever you're thinking.”

He looked at her.

“I'm thinking that I don't know how long I get to have this.”

Her smile disappeared.

“This?”

He looked at her.

“Us.”

The rain became louder.

Nethmi swallowed.

“You have me now.”

“Yeah.”

“So?”

“I don't know.”

She hated that answer.

But she understood it.

That evening, they went to a temple.

The courtyard was quiet.

Rainwater sat in small pools between the stones.

There were flowers near the shrine.

Someone had lit incense.

The air smelled of wet earth.

A monk walked past.

A bell rang.

Nethmi sat beneath a tree.

Kavish sat beside her.

She whispered,

“Do you think families can accept things they don't understand?”

“Sometimes.”

“And if they don't?”

He looked at the courtyard.

“Then we have to decide.”

“Decide what?”

“What's more important.”

She looked at him.

“And what is more important?”

He didn't answer.

Nethmi smiled sadly.

“You're afraid.”

“Yeah.”

“Me too.”

Their hands rested on the bench.

Their fingers touched.

Neither moved away.

Slowly, Kavish turned his hand.

Nethmi's fingers slid into his.

They held hands.

The temple bell rang again.

She whispered,

“What if we don't work?”

Kavish looked at her.

“Then we'll remember.”

She looked down.

“That sounds sad.”

“Maybe.”

She squeezed his hand.

“Let's not decide the ending before we live the middle.”

Kavish smiled.

“Okay.”

That became their silent agreement.

CHAPTER THREE

Amma Knows

Nethmi's mother knew before Nethmi told her.

Mothers in Sri Lanka have a strange talent for knowing things their children haven't said.

One evening, Nethmi was sitting at the dining table.

Her mother was serving rice.

“More dhal?”

“No.”

“Take.”

“Amma, enough.”

“Eat.”

Nethmi sighed.

Her mother sat opposite her.

For a few minutes, they ate.

Then—

“Who is Kavish?”

Nethmi stopped.

Her spoon remained in her hand.

“Who?”

Her mother smiled.

“Don't do that.”

“Do what?”

“Act like I said a stranger's name.”

Nethmi looked down.

“You heard his name?”

“I have ears.”

“From where?”

“You talk on the phone.”

“I don't talk about him.”

“You do.”

“Amma!”

Her mother laughed.

“Okay. Fine.”

Nethmi stopped eating.

Her mother looked at her.

“Do you like him?”

Nethmi couldn't answer.

Her mother didn't push.

That somehow made it worse.

Finally—

“Yes.”

Her mother nodded.

“Hmm.”

“That's all?”

“What do you want me to say?”

“I don't know.”

“Is he good?”

Nethmi thought.

“Yes.”

“Does he respect you?”

“Yes.”

“Does he study?”

“Yes.”

“Does he work?”

“Sometimes.”

Her mother raised an eyebrow.

“Sometimes?”

“Amma, he's still studying.”

“Ah.”

Silence.

Then her mother asked,

“His family?”

“Galle.”

“That's not what I asked.”

Nethmi smiled.

“I don't know everything.”

“Then don't become too serious before you know.”

Nethmi looked at her.

Her mother continued eating.

“Love isn't bad.”

Nethmi waited.

“But love doesn't pay the electricity bill.”

“Amma!”

“I'm telling the truth.”

“You make everything about money.”

“No.”

Her mother put down the spoon.

“I make it about life.”

Nethmi became quiet.

Her mother softened.

“When I was your age, I also thought love was enough.”

Nethmi looked up.

“Really?”

“Of course.”

“You never told me.”

“Why would I tell my daughter everything?”

Nethmi smiled.

“What happened?”

Her mother looked toward the kitchen.

“Life happened.”

That was all she said.

Nethmi didn't ask again.

Kavish's father was not against love either.

That was what made him difficult to argue with.

He never shouted.

He never insulted Nethmi.

He never said, “You cannot love her.”

He only asked questions.

Where will you work?

Where will you live?

What happens if she gets a job in Colombo?

What happens if you have to return to Galle?

What happens when your parents become old?

What happens if she doesn't want the same life?

Kavish hated those questions.

Because he didn't have answers.

One evening, he finally lost patience.

“Thaththa, can you just let me live?”

His father looked at him.

“I am letting you live.”

“No, you're planning my life.”

“I'm asking you to plan it yourself.”

“I know what I want.”

“What?”

Kavish stopped.

His father waited.

“What?”

Kavish looked away.

His father nodded.

“That's what I thought.”

Kavish became angry.

“Why do you always do this?”

“Do what?”

“Make me feel like I'm a child.”

“You are my child.”

“I'm not a child anymore.”

“Then stop speaking like one.”

The words landed hard.

Kavish stood.

His mother came from the kitchen.

“Enough.”

Neither spoke.

She looked at her husband.

Then at her son.

“Both of you sit.”

“Amma—”

“Sit.”

Kavish sat.

His mother placed tea in front of them.

“Drink.”

Nobody moved.

She looked at Kavish.

“Your father isn't telling you not to love her.”

Kavish looked down.

“He's afraid.”

“Of what?”

“Of you making a decision that you can't undo.”

Kavish's voice softened.

“I know.”

His mother looked at him.

“Then don't make a decision because you're afraid of losing her.”

He looked up.

“Make it because you know what you want.”

The room became quiet.

His mother took a sip of tea.

Then said,

“And if you don't know?”

Kavish smiled weakly.

“Then?”

“Then don't lie and say you know.”

That night he called Nethmi.

She answered.

“Hello?”

“Hi.”

“You sound weird.”

“Thanks.”

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Again?”

He laughed.

“Sorry.”

She was quiet.

Then asked,

“Did you fight with your father?”

Kavish stopped.

“How do you know?”

“Your voice.”

He leaned back.

“Yeah.”

“What happened?”

He told her.

She listened.

When he finished, she said,

“Your father isn't wrong.”

Kavish sat up.

“What?”

“Don't get angry.”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

He sighed.

She continued.

“He's scared.”

“I know.”

“And my amma is scared too.”

“Of me?”

“Not you.”

“Then?”

“Of me.”

Kavish understood.

Nethmi continued quietly.

“She's scared I'll choose something because I love someone and then regret it.”

He didn't know what to say.

“Do you regret me?”

The question came out before he could stop it.

Silence.

Long silence.

“Nethmi?”

“No.”

Her voice was quiet.

“Never.”

His eyes closed.

She continued.

“But I'm scared.”

“Of what?”

“Of losing myself.”

Kavish understood that too.

“Then don't.”

“What?”

“Don't lose yourself.”

She smiled.

“You make it sound easy.”

“I didn't say it was easy.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sea Does Not Answer

The offer came in July.

Kavish was sitting in a small office in Colombo when his phone rang.

He answered.

“Hello?”

His father's voice.

“Did you get the email?”

“What email?”

“Check.”

Kavish opened his laptop.

There it was.

The job.

Good company.

Good salary.

Good future.

But the position was in Galle.

His father had arranged the interview weeks ago.

Kavish had forgotten about it.

Or pretended to.

He read the details.

His chest tightened.

His father said,

“Good opportunity.”

Kavish didn't answer.

“Take it seriously.”

“I will.”

“You can come home.”

Kavish stared at the screen.

Home.

That word had always been comforting.

Now it felt heavy.

He told Nethmi that evening.

They were sitting near the railway station.

She had bought two fish buns.

He had tea.

“There's something.”

She immediately knew.

“What?”

“I got a job.”

Her face brightened.

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Where?”

He didn't answer.

Her smile disappeared.

“Where?”

“Galle.”

Silence.

The city moved around them.

People were going home.

A bus stopped.

A conductor shouted.

A child cried.

Someone laughed.

Nethmi stared at the fish bun in her hand.

“When?”

“Three months.”

She nodded.

“That’s good.”

“Nethmi.”

“I'm happy for you.”

“You don't sound happy.”

“I am.”

“You're crying.”

She touched her cheek.

She hadn't noticed.

“I didn't know.”

Kavish reached toward her.

She moved back.

“Don't.”

“Nethmi.”

“Don't make it harder.”

“What do you want me to do?”

She looked at him.

“I don't know.”

He almost smiled.

She noticed.

“Don't laugh.”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

“I'm sorry.”

She looked away.

The rain started.

Small drops first.

Then more.

People opened umbrellas.

The pavement became dark.

Kavish said,

“I have to take it.”

She looked at him.

“Why?”

“My family needs me.”

“And?”

“I need the job.”

“And?”

He stopped.

She waited.

“And?”

His voice became quiet.

“I don't know if I can keep doing Colombo.”

Nethmi stared at him.

There it was.

The sentence she had been afraid of.

Not I don't love you.

Something worse.

I don't know if I can keep doing this.

She looked at the rain.

“Okay.”

“Nethmi…”

“It's okay.”

He stood too.

“Wait.”

She turned.

“What?”

“I'm not leaving you.”

She looked at him.

Her eyes were full.

“You don't get it.”

“Then tell me.”

“I don't want to spend the next five years waiting for you to decide whether I'm part of your life.”

“Nethmi—”

“I don't.”

She shook her head.

“I want a life too.”

He nodded.

“I know.”

“No, you don't.”

She stepped closer.

“You keep saying you know.”

Her voice broke.

“You know what my amma wants. You know what your father wants. You know what your job wants. You know what everybody wants.”

She looked directly at him.

“Do you know what I want?”

Kavish couldn't answer.

Her face changed.

That was enough.

She nodded.

“Exactly.”

She walked away.

Kavish stood in the rain.

He didn't follow.

That was his mistake.

Or maybe it wasn't.

He would spend years wondering.

That night Nethmi cried quietly in her room.

Her mother sat outside.

She didn't enter immediately.

She waited.

Then knocked.

“Nethmi.”

No answer.

“Duwa.”

Still nothing.

Her mother opened the door.

Nethmi was lying facing the wall.

Her mother sat beside her.

“Amma...”

“Hmm?”

“I hate him.”

Her mother didn't say anything.

Nethmi cried harder.

“I hate him so much.”

Her mother gently touched her hair.

“Hmm.”

“Why doesn't he choose me?”

Her mother remained silent.

“Why?”

Then her mother said something Nethmi would remember for years.

“Maybe he is choosing you.”

Nethmi turned.

“What?”

“Maybe he is trying to build something instead of giving you words.”

“That doesn't make me feel better.”

“I know.”

Nethmi cried.

Her mother hugged her.

“Come here.”

Nethmi leaned into her.

She was no longer a university student.

No longer someone trying to look strong.

She was just someone's daughter.

And her mother held her like she had when she was six years old and afraid of thunder.

“Amma…”

“Hmm?”

“What if he leaves?”

Her mother closed her eyes.

“Then you will still have yourself.”

Nethmi cried against her shoulder.

Her mother continued,

“Don't make another person the whole house you live in, duwa.”

Nethmi didn't understand the sentence fully then.

Years later, she would.

Kavish sat outside his house in Galle that night.

His father came out.

He sat beside him.

Neither spoke.

After a while, his father said,

“Did you tell her?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

Kavish laughed bitterly.

“She hates me.”

His father looked at the sea.

“She doesn't.”

“You weren't there.”

“No.”

Kavish rubbed his face.

“She said I don't choose her.”

His father was quiet.

Then asked,

“Do you?”

Kavish looked at him.

“Do I what?”

“Choose her.”

Kavish's eyes filled.

“I love her.”

“That's not what I asked.”

Kavish stared at the ground.

His father continued.

“Love is a feeling. Choosing is a decision.”

Kavish swallowed.

“Then I choose her.”

“Good.”

Kavish looked up.

“But can you choose her without destroying yourself?”

Silence.

His father placed a hand on his shoulder.

“That's the part you need to answer.”

Three days passed.

No call.

Four.

Five.

On the sixth night, Nethmi's phone rang.

Kavish.

She stared at it.

She didn't answer.

It stopped.

Then came a message.

I'm sorry.

She put the phone face down.

Another message.

Not because I don't love you.

She closed her eyes.

Another.

Because I do.

She didn't reply.

Another message arrived.

I'm going to take the job.

Nethmi's heart dropped.

Then:

But I'm not asking you to wait for me.

She stared at the screen.

Another:

I want you to finish what you started. Your studies. Your life. Everything.

Her eyes filled.

Then:

If one day our lives come back to the same road, I'll be there.

She read it again.

And again.

The last message came.

If they don't, I will still be grateful that I met you.

Nethmi put the phone down.

She cried.

Not because he had left.

Because for the first time, she understood that loving somebody sometimes meant allowing them to walk away without turning their leaving into hatred.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Last Train

Kavish left Colombo on a Sunday morning.

Nethmi didn't go to the station.

She told herself it was because she had work.

That wasn't true.

She was afraid.

Afraid that if she saw him, she would ask him to stay.

Afraid that if she asked, he might.

Afraid that if he stayed, one day they would blame each other.

So she stayed home.

At 8:15, her phone vibrated.

On the train.

She didn't answer.

At 8:43:

Nethmi?

She stared at it.

At 9:02:

You don't have to reply.

She finally typed:

Be safe.

His reply came.

You too.

That was it.

The relationship didn't officially end that day.

But something did.

The easy part.

The part where they believed that love alone would keep finding a way.

The months became years.

Not many.

Enough.

Nethmi finished university.

She got a job.

Her mother cried when she wore her first proper office clothes.

“Aney, my little girl.”

“Amma, don't cry.”

“Who is crying?”

“You!”

“I'm not.”

“You are.”

“Go to work.”

Nethmi laughed.

Her father stood in the doorway.

He smiled.

“Do well.”

She nodded.

“Thanks, Thaththa.”

She left.

On the bus, she sat beside the window.

She remembered Kavish.

The thought came suddenly.

She looked at the seat beside her.

Empty.

She smiled.

Then looked away.

Kavish's life changed too.

His father became quieter.

His mother grew older.

The house in Galle needed repairs.

His job became serious.

He learned how much work adulthood actually was.

There were days he came home tired and didn't want to speak.

His mother would still ask,

“Bath ekak gannawada?”

“Later.”

“Later kiyala thamai.”

He smiled.

“Amma, I'm tired.”

“Then eat first.”

He sat at the table.

She served him.

“Rice?”

“Little.”

She put too much.

“Amma.”

“Eat.”

Sometimes, after dinner, he walked toward the sea.

He remembered Nethmi.

Not every day.

But often enough.

Sometimes he wondered where she was.

Then one night, his mother asked,

“Still thinking about her?”

Kavish nearly choked.

“Amma!”

She laughed.

“Don't act surprised.”

“Why didn't you ever say anything?”

“What should I say?”

“Anything.”

She looked at him.

“You loved her.”

He became quiet.

“Maybe you still do.”

Kavish looked toward the window.

His mother continued eating.

“Do you?”

He didn't answer.

She smiled.

“Hmm.”

“Amma.”

“Eat.”

Nethmi returned to Galle alone one evening.

She hadn't planned it.

She had taken a day off.

She needed somewhere quiet.

The Fort was quieter than she remembered.

Or maybe she was louder inside.

She walked past the old café.

Past the wall.

Past the place where they had once eaten ice cream.

She stopped at the tea stall.

The same kind of tea.

The same smell.

Plain tea.

Fried vadai.

Rain somewhere in the distance.

She ordered one.

“Plain tea.”

The old man behind the counter nodded.

She held the cup.

The heat warmed her fingers.

Then someone said,

“Still plain tea?”

Her heart stopped.

She knew that voice.

She turned.

Kavish.

He looked older.

Not old.

Just different.

His hair was shorter.

His face was a little thinner.

There were tired lines near his eyes.

But it was him.

For several seconds, neither spoke.

Then Nethmi said,

“You're still annoying.”

His smile appeared.

“Good to see you too.”

She laughed.

It came out unexpectedly.

Kavish looked relieved.

“How are you?”

“Fine.”

“Fine?”

“Busy.”

“Same.”

He nodded.

She looked at his clothes.

“You're working here?”

“No.”

“Then?”

“My office is nearby.”

“Oh.”

Silence.

Then he asked,

“Are you alone?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

She looked at him.

“Why do you ask?”

“Just asking.”

She smiled.

“You haven't changed.”

“You have.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“Bad?”

“No.”

He looked at her.

“Good.”

She looked away.

The tea seller placed another cup on the counter.

Kavish had ordered one.

Of course.

Plain tea.

Nethmi laughed softly.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me.”

“Still plain tea.”

“Some things don't change.”

She looked at him.

That sentence stayed between them.

They walked toward the sea.

Neither asked permission.

It simply happened.

The sky was turning orange.

A cricket match was happening in an open space nearby.

Children shouted.

A ball rolled across the road.

A man shouted,

“Catch it!”

Someone caught it.

Everyone cheered.

The sea was restless.

Kavish leaned against the wall.

Nethmi stood beside him.

“How's your mother?”

“Good.”

“Your father?”

“Still bossing everyone around.”

She laughed.

“Your amma?”

“Still asking if I ate.”

“Good.”

“Your parents?”

“Good.”

“Good.”

The word sounded strange.

Too small.

After a while, Kavish said,

“Are you happy?”

Nethmi looked at him.

She thought before answering.

“Most days.”

He nodded.

“You?”

“Most days.”

She smiled.

“That sounds depressing.”

“It's honest.”

She looked at the sea.

“Do you remember the bus?”

“Every detail.”

“Liar.”

“I remember your bag.”

“What about it?”

“You always held it like somebody was going to steal it.”

She laughed.

“Maybe somebody was.”

“I was.”

She turned.

He smiled.

Then they became quiet.

The temple courtyard was almost empty when they reached it.

The evening bells were ringing.

Nethmi removed her shoes.

Kavish did too.

They walked slowly.

The ground was cool.

A few flowers lay near the shrine.

The air smelled of jasmine and incense.

The quiet was different from Colombo.

In Colombo, quiet was rare.

In Galle, quiet sometimes felt like a person sitting beside you.

They sat under the same tree.

Years had passed.

The tree looked bigger.

Nethmi looked at it.

“Remember?”

“Yeah.”

“The biscuits?”

“Don't remind me.”

“They were horrible.”

“You ate them.”

“I was being polite.”

Kavish laughed.

Then he became quiet.

Nethmi looked at him.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

She smiled.

“Still?”

“Still.”

The temple bell stopped.

For a moment, there was complete silence.

Then Nethmi said,

“Were you happy after you left?”

Kavish looked at the ground.

“Sometimes.”

“That's not an answer.”

“It's the truth.”

She nodded.

“Did you miss me?”

He looked at her.

“Yes.”

The answer was immediate.

Her heart tightened.

“Why didn't you come back?”

Kavish took a breath.

“I wanted to.”

“But?”

“I was afraid.”

“Of what?”

“Coming back with nothing.”

Nethmi frowned.

“I didn't need money.”

“I know.”

“Then?”

“I needed to feel like I could stand beside you.”

She looked away.

“You could have.”

“I didn't believe that.”

That hurt.

Not because he had failed her.

Because she understood.

Kavish continued.

“My father was getting older. My mother needed me. Work was becoming serious. I thought if I came back to Colombo, I'd be choosing you against everything else.”

“And?”

“And I didn't want to make you carry that.”

Nethmi looked at him.

“You decided for me.”

He nodded.

“Yes.”

“That was unfair.”

“I know.”

She looked at him for a long time.

Then whispered,

“I was angry with you for years.”

“I know.”

“How?”

“Your messages.”

She laughed.

“I barely messaged you.”

“Exactly.”

She looked down.

A tear fell.

Kavish saw it.

He didn't touch her.

That was different now.

He had learned that sometimes love means knowing when not to reach.

Nethmi wiped her cheek.

“I thought you didn't choose me.”

Kavish's voice was quiet.

“I chose you.”

She looked at him.

“I just didn't know how.”

That was the sentence that broke something inside her.

Not loudly.

Quietly.

Like an old knot finally loosening.

She cried.

Kavish looked away to give her privacy.

She laughed through the tears.

“Why are you looking away?”

“Because you're crying.”

“So?”

“I don't know what to do.”

“You never know what to do.”

He smiled.

“True.”

She wiped her face.

Then, after a moment—

“Kavish.”

“Hmm?”

“Do you still love me?”

He closed his eyes.

The temple courtyard was quiet.

Outside, the sea wind moved through the trees.

He could have lied.

He could have said no.

He could have made it easier.

Instead—

“Yes.”

Nethmi looked down.

Her lips trembled.

“That's not fair.”

“I know.”

“Why did you say it?”

“Because you asked.”

She laughed.

Then cried again.

“Idiot.”

“I know.”

CHAPTER SIX

The Sea Between Two Evenings

They didn't get back together that night.

That was the part people wouldn't understand.

There was no sudden promise.

No engagement.

No dramatic decision.

No “let's start again.”

They were not the same people anymore.

Nethmi had built a life.

Kavish had built one too.

There were parents.

Jobs.

Responsibilities.

Different cities.

Years that couldn't be returned.

You can't simply walk backward through time because you finally understand something.

So they sat together.

And talked.

For hours.

They talked about everything they hadn't said.

Nethmi told him about the night she cried in her mother's arms.

Kavish told her about the first night he slept in Galle after leaving Colombo and couldn't stop looking at his phone.

She told him about her first day at work.

He told her about his father's illness.

She told him she had almost called him three times.

He told her he had almost come to Colombo twice.

“Why didn't you?”

“Fear.”

She laughed.

“You always blame fear.”

“Because fear is very useful.”

“No. Fear is stupid.”

“Maybe.”

They sat there.

The night grew darker.

A street vendor closed his cart.

The last cricket players left.

A bus passed.

The sea kept moving.

When Nethmi finally stood, it was late.

Kavish stood too.

“I should go.”

“Yeah.”

She put on her shoes.

They walked toward the gate.

Neither knew what to say.

At the entrance, Nethmi stopped.

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

She took a step.

Then stopped.

“Kavish.”

“Hmm?”

“Do you remember the first thing you said to me?”

He smiled.

“Careful.”

“No.”

He laughed.

“You almost fell.”

“That wasn't the first thing.”

“I caught your bag.”

“You said, ‘Careful.’”

“Same thing.”

“No.”

She smiled.

“You said sorry.”

“Because I hit you.”

“Twice.”

“Twice?”

“Your shoulder.”

He laughed.

“See? You remember everything.”

She looked at him.

“Unfortunately.”

They stood there.

For a second, she wanted to hug him.

She didn't.

He wanted to hold her hand.

He didn't.

Not because they didn't want to.

Because some things are more beautiful when you don't rush them.

“Maybe we'll meet again,” he said.

Nethmi smiled.

“Maybe.”

“That's it?”

She looked at him.

“What do you want?”

“I don't know.”

She laughed.

“There it is.”

“What?”

“Your favourite answer.”

He smiled.

She started walking.

After a few steps, she turned.

Kavish was still there.

She raised her hand.

He raised his.

Then she left.

The next morning, Nethmi sat on the train.

She had a window seat.

Galle slowly disappeared.

The Fort.

The houses.

The coconut trees.

The roads.

The sea.

She watched the coastline for as long as she could.

Her phone vibrated.

Kavish.

Reached the station?

She smiled.

On the train.

Okay.

A few seconds later:

Nethmi.

She waited.

Hmm?

The typing appeared.

Disappeared.

Appeared again.

Then:

Thank you.

She stared at the message.

She knew what he meant.

Not thank you for coming.

Not thank you for the tea.

Not thank you for talking.

Something larger.

Something they didn't need to name.

She typed:

For what?

His reply came:

Everything.

She looked out the window.

The sea was still there.

She typed:

You're welcome.

Then she put the phone away.

She didn't cry.

Not this time.

Years later, she would still remember that train.

Not because something happened.

Because nothing did.

And perhaps that was the strangest part.

Life often teaches us to look for endings.

A wedding.

A funeral.

A goodbye.

A final message.

A last kiss.

But real life doesn't always give you those things.

Sometimes a person simply becomes part of your memory.

You carry them.

Quietly.

You go to work.

You pay bills.

You argue with your mother.

You complain about traffic.

You drink tea.

You laugh with friends.

You get older.

And somewhere inside all of that, there is still a bus ride.

A boy with wet hair.

A black backpack.

A blue file.

A girl moving her bag so he could sit beside her.

Two shoulders touching on a crowded Colombo bus.

A stupid joke.

A paper cup of plain tea.

A rainy afternoon.

A walk under an umbrella that was too small.

A temple courtyard.

A hand finding another hand.

A train travelling south.

A sea that never answered any of their questions.

Nethmi sometimes wondered what would have happened if she had answered his first message differently.

What if she had stayed at the bus stop?

What if she had said yes immediately?

What if Kavish had stayed in Colombo?

What if she had gone to Galle earlier?

What if their parents had been different?

What if they had been braver?

What if they had been less afraid?

There were too many questions.

But she no longer hated them.

Some questions were not meant to be answered.

They were meant to remind you that you had once stood at a crossroads.

And that you had chosen.

One evening, years later, Nethmi stood near the sea in Colombo.

The city was loud behind her.

Buses.

Horns.

Three-wheelers.

Street vendors.

Someone calling for isso wade.

A tea seller shouting,

“Tea dekak!”

A cricket match was playing somewhere nearby on a television.

A temple bell rang in the distance.

The sky was turning dark.

She bought a plain tea.

She held the paper cup between her hands.

For some reason, she smiled.

Her phone vibrated.

A message.

Kavish.

You still drink plain tea?

She stared at it.

Then laughed.

She typed:

You still ask stupid questions?

The reply came quickly.

Yes.

She looked toward the sea.

The wind came in gently.

For a moment she could almost smell the rain from that old Colombo evening.

She could almost hear his voice.

I'm from Galle. We have rain too.

She smiled.

Then typed:

How's Galle?

The reply took longer.

Same.

She laughed.

That's not an answer.

Three dots appeared.

Then:

Sea. Wind. Cricket. Amma asking if I ate.

Nethmi stared at the screen.

Her eyes became wet.

Not from sadness.

Not exactly.

She typed:

Sounds nice.

His reply:

You'd like it.

She didn't answer immediately.

The sea breeze touched her face.

Colombo lights came on one by one.

Somewhere behind her, a bus conductor shouted a destination.

People hurried home.

A woman carried groceries.

A schoolboy ran across the road.

A man closed his tea stall.

The world kept moving.

Nethmi finally typed:

Maybe one day.

She looked at the message.

She almost deleted it.

She didn't.

She sent it.

Then she put her phone away.

She didn't know what would happen next.

Maybe nothing.

Maybe another train.

Maybe another tea.

Maybe another evening in Galle.

Maybe years would pass again.

Maybe their lives would finally find the same road.

Maybe they wouldn't.

But for once, she didn't feel the need to know.

The sea didn't promise anything.

It never had.

It simply kept arriving.

Wave after wave.

Night after night.

And perhaps love was a little like that.

Not always a person standing beside you.

Not always a hand you could hold.

Sometimes it was only the memory of warmth after the hand was gone.

Sometimes it was a voice you could still hear when the city became quiet.

Sometimes it was a place.

A bus seat.

A temple courtyard.

A railway window.

A tea stall in the rain.

A mother calling from the kitchen,

“Duwa, kanna!”

A father sitting silently with the television on.

A cricket ball hitting a wall.

A temple bell at dusk.

The smell of fried fish and wet earth.

The taste of plain tea.

And two young people who once met by chance and, for a little while, made an ordinary life feel different.

Nethmi finished her tea.

She looked at the sea.

The horizon was dark.

She smiled.

Then she started walking home.

Not toward Kavish.

Not away from him.

Just home.

And somewhere far south, perhaps, another person was standing beside another sea, looking into the same darkness.

Neither of them knew what tomorrow would bring.

But they had learned something.

Some people leave.

Some people stay.

Some people return.

And some people become part of you so quietly that even years later, when the rain touches a tiled roof or the smell of plain tea rises into the evening air, you turn your head for half a second—

just in case.

Just in case they are still there.

And sometimes, perhaps, that little moment is enough.

AUTHOR'S CLOSING NOTE

Some stories do not need a perfect ending.

They only need to leave something behind.

A place.

A voice.

A smell after rain.

A road you once walked.

A person you once loved.

The Sea Between Two Evenings is a story about those things — about young love, family, growing up, distance, choices, and the memories that remain even when life moves in another direction.

For every reader who has ever wondered **“What if?”**, this story is for you.

Sonal Dahanayaka

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